

sections of town were severely diminished.  
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Besides municipal and county patronage positions, some repayment of political debts was done in social circles. For example, Congressman John Bellamy “entertained” with a meal and fellowship the men of the Second Regimental Band as thanks for their support of his “cause” in the election. For many of the men, the evening with Bellamy would be the first time they entered, on almost equal footing, the social world of Wilmington’s elite as they were entertained in Bellamy’s dining room and parlors. Such social elevation could thrust men from anonymity into the limelight and translate into financial boons.<sup>109</sup>

Problems soon cropped up among the city’s newly hired white workforce, particularly in the lumber mills, factories, and other jobs traditionally held by black laborers. Employers found a poor work ethic among white employees, particularly those in the mills, and others who observed that black workers were the “least troublesome labor” were proven correct.<sup>110</sup> White workers also expected higher pay. Even before the election, the papers speculated that white workers taking over traditionally black jobs would be hired at the same pay scale as their predecessors—wages that many would feel were less than adequate. After the “boycott” of black labor began, Waddell remarked to a northern reporter that he thought it would be better if black workers left the South for northern employment, but acknowledged that there was “a certain class of black labor that we could not well get along without.” Those

invaluable workers, in Waddell’s opinion, were cooks, laundresses and stablemen: “I expect the whole south would have dyspepsia in a week if we had to live on northern cooking, we are so used to the southern way of preparing dishes.” Waddell concluded that “wages are very low in the south and I doubt if we could get white men to come down here and work for anything like the negroes receive.”<sup>111</sup>

African American life in Wilmington was changed irrevocably with the loss of a political voice in city government and a concerted effort to downgrade black employment prospects. Municipal jobs were patronage positions, given to political supporters after a victory by the mayor and aldermen. Because most municipal positions—certainly the most lucrative and best—were restricted to white workers after the coup, many blacks who had traditionally relied upon the city for income were now unemployed. For example, in 1897, the city’s fire department hired sixteen African American firemen to staff the two all-black fire stations. In 1898, those positions were converted into white jobs, and one of the fire stations was closed. Further, at least twelve of the city’s regular police officers were African American, and, following the coup, those men were also out of a job. For these two high-profile municipal job categories, workers lost a source of moderate income with no hope of finding an equivalent position. The change in city employment from a mixed-race staff to an all-white one gradually trickled down to clerks and janitorial workers.<sup>112</sup>

Further changes were on the horizon for the city as trends developed that favored

<sup>108</sup> Melton testimony, *Contested Election Case*, 370; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 12, 1898; Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 191-198.

<sup>109</sup> *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 16, 1898.

<sup>110</sup> Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 146; R. Beverly Mason to Bess, November 8, 1898, John Steele Henderson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

<sup>111</sup> *Asbury Park Evening News*, November 21, 1898; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), October 28, November 2, 4, 1898.

<sup>112</sup> “Minutes of the Wilmington Board of Aldermen” State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.